



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

EXTRAORDINARY DETECTION OF MURDER.

It is a speculation perhaps equally interesting to the philosopher as to the untutored mind, and dwelt on with as much placidity by the one as by the other, to reflect on the various and extraordinary modes by which the hand of Providence has through all ages withdrawn the dark mantle of concealment from the murderer's form, and stamped condemnation on his brow—sometimes before the marks of the bloody deed were yet dried, and sometimes after long years of security had seemed to insure final escape, whether the detection arose from some peculiar circumstance awaking remorse so powerfully as to compel the murderer to self-accusation through an ungovernable impulse; from the hauntings of guilty terror; from over-anxiety to avoid suspicion; or from some utterly slight and unforeseen casualty.

The popular belief has always been, that of all criminals the shedder of blood never escapes detection and punishment even in this life; and though a very limited experience may show the fallacy of such belief as regards the vengeance man can inflict, who may conceive that inflicted by the tortured conscience?—that hell which even the unbeliever does not mock, which permits neither hope nor rest, invests the summer sunshine with a deeper blackness than that of midnight, peoples the air with moving and threatening spectres, embodies the darkness into terrible shapes, and haunts even slumber with visionary terrors more hideous than the worst realities.

The records of crime in our own and other countries contain numerous striking examples of the detection of murder by singular and sometimes apparently trivial means. These have appeared in a variety of published forms, and are of course generally known; but we shall select a few unpublished instances which have come within our own cognizance, and seem to us to possess peculiar and striking features of their own, in the hope that they may be found to possess some interest for the readers of the Irish Penny Journal.

The case we shall first select, not so much for the manner of the murderer's detection as for the singular plan he struck out to escape suspicion, and the strange circumstances connected with the crime and its punishment altogether, is that of a man named M'Gennis, for the murder of his wife.

M'Gennis, when we saw him on his trial, was a peculiarly powerful-looking man, standing upwards of six feet, strongly proportioned, and evidently of great muscular strength. His countenance, however, was by no means good, his face being colourless, his brow heavy, and the whole cast of his features stern and forbidding. From his appearance altogether he struck us at once as one eminently fitted and likely to have played a conspicuous part in the faction fights so common during his youth at our fairs and markets. But though we made several inquiries both then and since, we could not learn that he had ever been prominent in such scenes, or remarkable for a quarrelsome disposition. He was a small farmer, residing at a village nearly in a line between the little town of Claremorris, and the still smaller but more ancient one of Ballyhaunis, near the borders of Mayo. With him lived his mother and wife, a very comely young woman, it is said, to whom he had not been long married at the time of the perpetration of the murder, and with whom he had never had any previous altercation such as to attract the observation or interference of the neighbours.

It was on a market evening of Claremorris, in the year 1830, that the mother of M'Gennis, a withered hag, almost doubled with age, and who on our first seeing her strongly reminded us of the witches that used, in description at least, to frighten and fascinate our boyhood, hobbled with great apparent terror into the cabin nearest her own, and alarmed the occupants by stating that she had heard a noise in the potato room, and that she feared her daughter-in-law was doing some harm to herself. Two or three of them accordingly returned speedily with her, and, entering the room, saw the lifeless body of the unfortunate young woman lying on the potatoes in a state of complete nudity. There was no blood or mark of violence on any part of the body, except the face and throat, round the latter of which a slight handkerchief was suffocatingly tied, by which she had evidently been strangled, as both face and neck were blackened and swollen.

Who then had perpetrated the deed? was the question whispered by all the neighbours as they came and went. M'Gennis, according to his mother's account, had not yet

returned from the market; the hag herself would not have had strength to accomplish the murder even if bloody-minded enough to attempt it, and it was next to an impossibility that the young woman herself could have committed self-destruction in that manner.

While the callous hag was so skilfully supporting her part in the murderous drama, the chief performer, who had not been seen to return from the market, immediately after the commission of the horrid deed, through whatever motive he had done it, crossed a neighbouring river to Bricken, where it intersects the high-road by means of stepping-stones, as bridge it had none,* though it is occasionally in winter a furious torrent. On the opposite side he chanced to meet a country tailor (we forget his name), who was proceeding from one village to another, to exercise his craft in making and mending; and the devil suggesting a plan on the spur of the moment, which was to recoil with destruction on his guilty head, he forced the tailor to take on his knees the most fearful oaths that he would never divulge what should then be revealed to him, and that he would act in strict conformity with the directions he should receive, threatening, if he refused compliance, to beat out his brains with a stone, and then fling him into the river.

The affrighted tailor having of course readily taken the required oaths, M'Gennis confessed to him the murder of his wife, using at the same time horrible imprecations, that if ever a word on the subject escaped the tailor's lips, he would, *dead or alive*, take the most deadly vengeance on him. He then proceeded to cut and dinge his hat in several places, and inflict various scratches on his hands and face, directing the tailor to assert that he had found *him* attacked by four men on the road, on his return from Claremorris; after which, to give the more appearance of probability to the tale, he obliged his involuntary accessory after the fact (as the law has it) to bear him on his back to a cabin at some distance, as if the murderer were too weak to proceed himself after the violent assault committed on him. And here, if we could venture to raise a smile in the course of so revolting a detail, we would observe, that it must have been a ludicrous sight to see the tailor, who was but a meagre specimen of humanity, trailing along the all but giant frame of the murderer. The poor tailor's own feelings were, however, at the time much more akin to mortal terror than to mirth or humour, as he found at the same time his mind burdened with an unwished-for, terrible, and dangerous secret, and himself in company with the murderer, who might at any moment change his mind, repent his confession, and take his life too.

On reaching the cabin, the tailor told the story of the pretended attack, as he had been directed, while M'Gennis himself, showing his scratches, and detailing in a weak voice the assault on him by men he did not know, affected such faintness as to fall from the chair on which he had been placed. A farrier was then procured at his request; and to such lengths did he proceed with the plan he had struck out, that he got himself blooded, though the farrier shrewdly perceived at the same time (according to his after evidence) that there seemed to be no weakness whatever about him, except in his voice, and that his pulse was strong and regular.

It may seem strange at first that M'Gennis should have divulged to the tailor, an entire stranger, the secret of his guilt, then unknown to any being on earth but his mother; but an instant's reflection will show us that when once the thought occurred to make use of the tailor's assistance in the manner described to aid him in avoiding detection, he might just as well confess the whole terrible secret, which, coming from *him*, would strike additional terror—the only engine on which he could rely for procuring the secrecy and assistance he required. Accordingly, so strongly was the terror impressed, that on the following day the tailor disappeared from that part of the country, and reappeared not, though M'Gennis and his mother were at once committed on suspicion, till the approach of the ensuing assizes, when he came forward, probably as much induced by the large reward offered for the murderer's conviction, as for the purpose of disburdening himself of his fearful secret in aiding justice.

There was much interest excited at those assizes, we recollect, by the trial of M'Gennis and his mother, who were arraigned together, and of a grey-haired man named Cuffe, for a murder committed twenty-four years previously, of which more anon; and with respect to the former parties, there was

* There is a bridge now in progress of erection over it at this spot.

unmixed abhorrence expressed by the numerous auditors. It was indeed a revolting sight, and one not readily to be forgotten, the towering and powerfully proportioned son in the prime of life, and apparently with the most hardened callousness, *standing side by side to be tried for the same heinous offence with his withered parent, whose age-bowed head scarce reached his shoulder, while her rheumy and still rat-like eye wandered with an eager and restless gaze round the court, as if she was only alive to the novelty of the scene, and utterly unconcerned for the fearful position she stood in.* It was absolutely heart-sickening to see how repeatedly the wretched hag pulled her guilty son towards her during the trial, to whisper remarks and inquiries, frequently altogether unconnected with the evidence, and the crime she was accused of and believed to have instigated and aided in.

Even in the strongly guarded court, it was on the side of the dock remotest from where M'Gennis stood that the tailor ventured forward to give his evidence, though the murderer's reckless hardihood of bearing altered not for a moment, either in consequence of his appearance, or during the course of his evidence; in fact, he seemed to be principally occupied in answering his mother's queries, and quieting her.

The testimony of the tailor, bearing strongly the impress of truth, singular as it was, was strengthened by that of the brother of the deceased, who seemed greatly affected while deposing that he had met M'Gennis in Claremorris on the day of the murder, and that the handkerchief afterwards found round his sister's neck had been worn by the murderer on that occasion. There was not an iota of evidence for the prisoners, and accordingly a verdict against the son was instantly handed in, though the vile hag was acquitted for want of substantiating evidence against her, to the regret of a crowded court.

After condemnation, M'Gennis was placed in the same cell with Cuffe, the other murderer, who had been also convicted; and nothing could be more dissimilar than their demeanour while together. Cuffe was calm, communicative, and apparently penitent, while M'Gennis was sullen and silent; nor could all the exertions of the clergymen who attended him induce him to acknowledge either guilt or repentance. On the morning after conviction, an alarm was given in the cell by Cuffe, and on entering, the turnkeys found that M'Gennis had anticipated the hangman's office, by rather strangling than hanging himself. He had effected the suicide by means of a slight kerchief appended to the latch of the door, which was scarcely three feet from the floor, and on a level with which he had brought his neck, by shooting the lower portion of his body along the cell-flaps from the door; and perhaps not the least remarkable fact connected with this extraordinary suicide is, that the handkerchief was the very one with which he had effected the murder of his wife, and which had been produced on the trial. It is very unusual for any article produced in evidence to find its way to the dock, but in this case it appears the handkerchief must by some strange casualty have come into the hands of the murderer again; and having soaped it highly (he was allowed soap even in the condemned cell), he consummated his fearful deeds with it.

Shortly after the discovery of the suicide, we among others visited the cell to see the body, when, in a conversation with the acute and highly intelligent physician to the prison, he observed what iron nerves the murderer must have possessed to effect such a suicide, as from his own height, and the lowness of the latch, he must, in order to complete the strangulation, have persevered for several minutes in keeping his neck strained, during any one of which, up to the last few, he might have readily recovered himself. The body was still stretched on the flaps, and exhibited the appearance of a very powerful frame; and when we considered the desperate and utterly fearless mind that had actuated it, it struck us, and others who spoke on the same subject, with more surprise than ever, that M'Gennis should not have been implicated in outrage and bloodshed long before. Such, however, it would appear, was not the case.

On being examined at the inquest, the other occupant of that fearful cell denied all knowledge of his brother convict's intention to commit suicide, or of his having committed it, until morning, stating that he had slept soundly, and heard no noise whatever during the night—a circumstance which seems rather curious, as the cell was but of small dimensions, and M'Gennis must have certainly made some noise, from the manner in which he had perpetrated the horrid deed. On the other hand, it is well known that persons, no matter how

restless or uneasy they may have been previously, almost invariably sleep soundly on the night before execution. All doubts and uncertainty are then over: the mental struggle has ceased.

Rumours, indeed, were afloat that Cuffe had witnessed the commission of the suicide, and that M'Gennis had urged him to do the like also, in order not to give their enemies and the crowd the gratification of witnessing their execution. But how could this circumstance be known, as Cuffe himself did not admit it? Another rumour was, that M'Gennis's mother, at parting with him, had instigated him to the terrible act; and this we would be more inclined to give credit to, from what we have heard of her character, as well as from our own observation of her demeanour throughout the trial.

The crime of murder is always that most revolting and abhorrent to our nature; but when committed on our bosom partner, whom we have sworn to defend and cherish, and who in her helplessness looks up to us as her only stay and protection on earth, it assumes an utterly fiendish character. That it was felt to be so in M'Gennis's case, unfortunately prone as we sometimes are to have sympathy for crime, we were ourselves a witness, as, on the verdict against him being proclaimed, there was an audible buzz of applause through the court; and when the account of his suicide afterwards became public, men expressed the most heart-felt gratification that the world was rid of such a fiend. Yet, singular it is that never since has it transpired, at least as far as we could learn, what motive M'Gennis could have had for the murder of his wife, to whom, as was before stated, he had not been long married. Reports there were, to be sure, that the wife and mother had led an uncomfortable and bickering life since coming together—unfortunately a very frequent case, and one which often produces much misery and crime in humble life; and that it was in consequence of the division of some milk at their homely evening meal, that an altercation arose, which, through the hag's instigation, led to the destruction of the daughter-in-law, and eventually to that of the son. But as these rumours only became current after the murder, it is not easy to attach much credit to them, especially if we place any reliance on the statement that M'Gennis had returned home from Claremorris through fields and bye-paths to avoid being seen, as if he had been contemplating the crime. At all events, whether he had contemplated it, or whether it emanated from a sudden burst of wrath fanned by his parent's wicked suggestions, it seems clearly not to have arisen from jealousy, hatred, or revenge—those passions so generally productive of such crime; and there is no one now living to explain the mystery, as the hag died without a word in explanation of it.

The space we have limited ourselves to, prevents us from saying more in this number of Cuffe, whose crime was of a much more national character, and occupied a good deal the attention of the government of the period; and whose detection, after a lapse of twenty-four years—in fact, after his having declined gradually from the prime of manhood to hoary-headed age—seems to go farther in supporting the popular prejudice that the murderer can never escape detection. But we shall take an early opportunity to detail to the reader his case, and the state of society that led to it. A.

THE BALD BARRYS,

OR

THE BLESSED THORN OF KILDINAN.

" ———— Make curl'd-pate ruffians

Quite bald."

SHAKESPEARE.

THE breeze of the declining March day blew keenly, as I strode across the extensive fields towards the old burial-ground of Kildinan, in the county of Cork. On reaching the ancient church, I rested on the broken bank that enclosed the cemetery, to contemplate the scene before me, and pause upon the generations of men that have been impelled along the stream of time towards the voiceless ocean of eternity, since the day on which an altar was first erected on this desolate spot, in worship of the Deity. The most accurate observer would scarcely suppose that this enclosure had ever been a place of interment, save that certain little hillocks of two or three spans long, and defined by a rude stone, were scattered along its surface. To a fanciful imagination these would seem to have been the graves of some pigmy nation, concerning